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FOREIGN NOTES

“OVER-INSTRUCTION” THE VOGUE, NOT EDUCATION.

The Schoolmaster, (London) Feb. 3, 1894.

With not one syllable stronger than the case demands, Huxley pillories that system with which we are, unfortunately, familiar in this country, the system of allowing over-instruction to masquerade as education.

“What wonder, then, if very recently an appeal has been made to statistics for the profoundly foolish purpose of showing that education is of no good—that it diminishes neither misery nor crime among the masses of mankind? I reply, why should the thing which has been called education do either the one or the other? If I am a knave or a fool, teaching me to read and write won't make me less of either one or the other—unless somebody shows me how to put my reading and writing to wise and good purposes.

“Suppose any one were to argue that medicine is of no use, because it could be proved statistically that the percentage of deaths was just the same among people who had been taught how to open a medicine chest, and among those who did not so much as know the key by sight. The argument is absurd; but it is not more preposterous than that against which I am contending. The only medicine for suffering, crime, and all the other woes of mankind, is wisdom. Teach a man to read and write, and you have put into his hands the great keys of the wisdom box. But it is quite another matter whether he ever opens the box or not. And he is as likely to poison as to cure himself, if, without guidance, he swallows the first drug that comes.”

ABOUT EXAMINATIONS.

Huxley's note here is unmistakable. “*Examination*,” he says, the italics being ours, “*like fire, is a good servant, but a bad master; and there seems to me to be some danger of its becoming our master.*” I by no means stand alone in this opinion. Experienced friends of mine do not hesitate to say that students whose career they watch, appear to them to become deteriorated by the constant effort to pass this or that examination, just as we hear of men's brains becoming affected by the daily necessity of catching a train. *They work to pass, not to know; and outraged Science takes her revenge. . . . I believe that examination will remain but an imperfect test of knowledge, and a still more imperfect test of capacity, while it tells next to nothing about a man's power as an investigator.*”

Elsewhere he says: "The educational abomination of desolation of the present day is the stimulation of young people to work at high pressure by incessant competitive examinations.

SCIENCE NOTES.

England. Journal of Education, (London) March, 1894.

There is a vast amount of work to be done yet in the direction of reforming science teaching in schools. It is still in too many cases the mere methodical acquisition of a text-book, relieved rather than illustrated by the performance of experiments, a concession to the parent rather than a part of the headmaster's conception of the educational process. So far, science teaching is not science teaching at all. The method and the mental operation are precisely the same as they would be in teaching history or what passes for literature in schools, save that statements have to be remembered about oxygen and nitrogen instead of Cromwell or Milton. Scientific people are beginning to realize that such instruction is bringing science into disrepute, and they will echo Mr. Hugh Gordon's dictum that "science had much better be left alone altogether than be taught unscientifically."

O. B. R.